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ABSTRACT

This report discusses factors affecting the decisions of minority groups to become teachers in gifted education. Forty-four minority teachers participated in this study. While 42 percent of the teachers reported that they currently work with gifted students, few shared their reasons. More teachers discussed why they had not become teachers of gifted students. Two themes related to social reasons and two related to personal reasons. Social reasons related to lack of administrative support and lack of gifted education programs. Personal reasons related to lack of interest and their teaching philosophy (i.e., the belief that all children are gifted). Likewise, the minority teachers identified social and personal reasons for becoming teachers of gifted students. Some teachers also shared how their experiences with special education students influenced their vocational choice. For instance, several teachers shared concerns regarding negative experiences in special education, as well as experience in working with gifted students with special needs. Social or external reasons for becoming teachers of gifted students included support and encouragement from colleagues and administration. Personal reasons included an interest in gifted students, primarily from curiosity, and a determination to demonstrate that minority teachers can be competent gifted education teachers. (Contains 38 references.) (CR)

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# Factors Affecting the Career Decision Making of Minority Teachers in Gifted Education

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The University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

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# THE NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER ON THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

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# Factors Affecting the Career Decision Making of Minority Teachers in Gifted Education

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## ABSTRACT

On a daily basis, our school student population is becoming increasingly diverse. Conversely, the teaching force is rather homogeneous relative to race and ethnicity. Now, more than ever before, educators are seeking ways to respond affirmatively to the changing demographics of the student population. Many schools have initiatives that target recruiting and retaining a more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse teaching force.

The focus on teacher diversity is most evident in the general education literature, where a consistent body of work indicates that minority groups are sorely under-represented in the teaching profession (e.g., Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1994, 1995; Dilworth, 1990). Comparatively speaking, little attention has focused on the presence of minority teachers in gifted education. This study seeks to address this void. It looks at factors affecting the decision of minority groups to become teachers in gifted education

Forty-four minority teachers participated in this study. Interestingly, while 42% of the teachers reported that they currently work with gifted students, few shared their reasons. More teachers discussed why they had *not* become teachers of gifted students. Two themes related to social reasons and two related to personal reasons. Social reasons related to lack of administrative support and lack of gifted education programs. Personal reasons related to lack of interest and philosophy (i.e., the belief that "all children are gifted"). Likewise the minority teachers identified social and personal reasons for becoming teachers of gifted students. Some teachers also shared how their experiences with special education students influenced their vocational choice. For instance, several teachers shared concerns regarding negative experiences in special education, as well as experience in working with gifted students with special needs.

Social or external reasons for becoming teachers of gifted students included support and encouragement from colleagues and administration. Personal reasons included an interest in gifted students, primarily curiosity and intrigue about these students, and a determination to demonstrate that minority teachers can be competent gifted education teachers.

Although a national study, the findings are limited due to the small sample size. Future studies must be conducted with larger numbers of teachers. Nonetheless, a critical factor identified in this study and others is the need for more administrators and school districts to encourage minority groups to enter gifted education. Recruiting minority groups into gifted education requires providing them with gifted education exposure and experience throughout their educational and professional experiences.

# Factors Affecting the Career Decision Making of Minority Teachers in Gifted Education

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

As the nation and our schools become increasingly diverse, educators have had to find ways to respond affirmatively to changing demographics. Reform reports abound on the need to reform education, particularly in school settings that have large percentages of ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse learners. While most of the responses and suggestions for reform target achievement-related issues (improving test scores, decreasing dropout rates, etc.), a relatively small (but increasing) body of work targets the need to increase the representation of minority teachers in educational settings.

The focus on teacher diversity is most evident in the general education literature, where a consistent body of work indicates that minority groups are sorely under-represented in the teaching profession (e.g., Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1994, 1995; Dilworth, 1990). Comparatively speaking, little attention has focused on the presence of minority teachers in gifted education. This study seeks to address this void. It looks at factors affecting the decision of minority groups to become teachers in gifted education.

### Review of the Literature

Educators, researchers, and policy makers have accumulated a massive amount of data on the scarcity of minority group representation in the teaching profession. The fact is that an inverse relationship exists over time between the percentage of minority students and minority teachers. Although minority students represent a large percentage of the school population (about 41%), less than 15% of the teaching profession is African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American combined. More specifically, in the teaching field, the Hispanic/Latino teacher representation is 3.1%, the Asian-Pacific Islander representation is 1%, the Black teacher representation is 9.2%, and the Native-American and Native-Alaskan teacher representation is .7% (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994; Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Few reports project an increase in the representation of minority teachers, despite the high demand for teachers in general and minority teachers in particular. Rather, there has been a steady decline of Black teachers between 1970 and 1986, and slight increases in 1991 and 1994 (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994). Projections indicate that minority students will comprise almost half (46%) of all public school students by 2020 (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; National Center for Education Statistics, 1994). Yet, this rise in minority students is unmatched by a proportional increase in minority teachers.

The recruitment and retention of minority teachers in education has already received extensive attention in general and special education. Specifically between 1983 and 1990,

many reform reports discussed the shortage of minority teachers, and proposed an agenda to recruit and retain more minority teachers. Today, with the large representation of minority students in urban schools and the under-representation of minority teachers, educators and policy makers must seriously examine the reasons minority groups do not enter the teaching profession.

### Recruitment Barriers

The number of minorities who aspire to teach is declining (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994; Dilworth, 1990; Gonzalez, 1997). Between 1975 and 1985, there was a decline of 66% in the number of African Americans who became teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Recruitment barriers include:

1. Fewer minority students are entering teaching.
2. Overall college participation rates by minorities continue to be below that of White students.
3. Low graduation rate of minorities from higher education.
4. Poor or negative experiences as K-12 and postsecondary students may discourage minority students from pursuing teaching as a career.
5. Education relies heavily on tests for screening, evaluation, and hiring decisions. Minority students tend not to perform well on standardized tests.

### Recruitment of Teachers in Gifted Education

Few pre-service programs offer the opportunity for training in gifted education, so few teachers are likely to think of that area of specialization or to have the opportunity to prepare for this specialization. However, recruitment into this specialty rests largely on experiences after graduation from college.

### Retention Factors

Black and other minority teachers are more likely than others to leave the teaching profession at higher and faster rates. Teachers, in general, evince a high attrition rate, estimated between 20% and 25% for beginning teachers, and between 33% and 50% for teachers in their first five years. Trends indicate that high school teachers, male teachers, inner-city urban teachers, and Black and Latino teachers are more likely to leave the profession than others (Harris and Metropolitan Life Foundation, 1988). Further, minority teachers are more likely to begin teaching in large urban school districts where teaching conditions are particularly difficult (Gay, 1997). Chester and Beaudin (1996) reported that urban teachers leave the profession for at least four reasons:

1. poor collegiality and collaboration,
2. inadequate support from administrators,
3. inadequate resources and materials, and
4. limited observations of and evaluative advice regarding their teaching.

## The Need for Diverse Teachers: Culturally Responsive Classrooms

Various explanations have been advanced regarding the need to increase the presence of minority teachers in education. Specifically, considerable evidence suggests that minority teachers play many roles for minority and White students. Works by Delpit

(1995), Ladson-Billings (1994), and Foster (1990) suggest that Black teachers are adept at mentoring and advocating for minority students, and they are effective at providing culturally responsive learning environments. Sharing the same or similar cultural backgrounds with their minority students, minority teachers are able to understand the learning styles and cultural styles of minority students (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). Just as important, minority students profess that they identify more with school when they have minority teachers (Gonzalez, 1997).

## Implications for Gifted Education

As stated on several occasions, one of the most stubborn problems in American education is the inability of our teacher education system to produce substantial numbers of teachers from racial, ethnic, and language minority groups (Gonzalez, 1997). While interest in teaching as a profession remains low nationally among all minority groups, there is consensus that the lack of representation of minority groups in the teaching profession is most egregious for Black, Hispanic American, and Native Americans (Gonzalez, 1997; James, 1993). What are the implications of minority teacher under-representation for gifted education?

The representation of minority teachers in gifted programs has received inadequate attention in the literature, while considerable literature has focused on increasing the representation of minority students in gifted education (e.g., Ford, 1994, 1996a; Frasier, García, & Passow, 1995; Frasier & Passow, 1994). If such efforts to increase the representation of minority students in gifted education are effective, a corresponding need will arise for increasing the presence of minority teachers in gifted education.

Similarly, a mismatch often occurs between the learning characteristics of gifted minority students and those listed on the many checklists that teachers complete. An examination of several nomination forms and checklists indicate that: the characteristics of underachieving and minority students are noticeably absent; they frequently lack national and local normative data; and they focus almost exclusively on academic and cognitive characteristics of giftedness while ignoring affective and cultural characteristics (Ford, 1996b; Ford & Harris, 1999).

These recruitment and retention issues highlight the need for a study exploring factors affecting the decision of minority teachers in gifted education. In seeking to fill this void, the current study sought to address three research questions:

1. What services do school districts and teachers provide to gifted students? To what extent are teachers providing services not offered by the district?
2. What factors (administrative, academic, personal, social—friends, family, colleagues) influence the decision of minority teachers to work with gifted students? Which factor(s) has/have the greatest influence? How do factors affecting the decision to become a teacher of gifted students differ from factors affecting the decision not to become a teacher of gifted students?
3. How does career decision making differ relative to (a) different minority groups (e.g., Hispanic, Asian, Black)? (b) males and females? and (c) teachers in urban, rural, and suburban districts?

## Methodology

### Sample

Five hundred schools were chosen from the national list of schools in the Institutional Studies Data, Public School New Address File (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). The schools were assigned random numbers and 10 schools were randomly selected from each state.

In July of 1996, school principals at the 500 schools were mailed a letter explaining the study. They were asked to complete and return a postcard indicating the number of minority teachers in their school building. This figure indicated the number of surveys to be mailed to the school. One hundred and seventeen postcards were returned by principals, indicating that there were 525 minority teachers in 53 schools. Sixty-four principals reported that they did not have minority teachers in their school.

Next, the surveys were mailed to the principals with a request to distribute the surveys to the designated number of minority teachers. A total of 525 surveys were mailed. In addition to the survey, teachers received a letter explaining the purpose of the survey and a self-addressed return envelope. Forty-four teachers returned the survey; 39 (89%) were female, and 32 (about 75%) were Black.

### Instrumentation

The survey contains 40 items and takes approximately one hour to complete. It is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on gifted education options offered by the respondent's district and whether the respondent personally provides such services. This section contains 27 items. Respondents check whether the services listed in this section are provided by (a) the district or (b) themselves as classroom teachers. The last item in this section gives participants an opportunity to indicate other gifted education services provided to students, but not listed on the survey. The second section was designed to gather qualitative information on factors that affected the teachers' decisions to become or not become teachers of gifted students. Thus, participants were given an opportunity to share their "story." In the final section (11 items), respondents were asked to provide information on their educational background and preparation in gifted education, as well as demographic information (age, gender, race, etc.)

## Data Analysis

Section one, which explored services offered to gifted students by districts and respondents, was analyzed using frequencies. The second section, which examined teachers' stories of factors influencing their decision to become or not become a teacher of gifted students, was analyzed for themes. The small sample size prevented comparative analyses, which was the objective of the third research question.

## Results

### Services Offered to Gifted Students by District and Respondent

What services do school districts and teachers provide to gifted students? To what extent are teachers providing services not offered by the district? Teachers indicated

whether the service listed was offered or not offered by their district, and whether they teach or offer the services themselves. According to teachers, the most frequently offered services provided by their district for gifted students are college courses (n=25); summer enrichment programs (n=24); college credit (n=21); college opportunities (n=21); advanced placement programs (n=21); clubs and extracurricular activities (n=20); some honors and/or advanced courses (n=20); all honors and/or advanced courses (n=19); courses added to a student's load (n=19); field trips (n=19); ability grouping (n=18); grade acceleration (n=17); enrichment in the regular room (n=16); and resource rooms (n=16).

Teachers were more likely to provide the following gifted education services: enrichment in the regular classroom (n=20); acceleration (n=14); field trips (n=14); clubs and extracurricular activities (n=14); curricular modifications (n=13); ability grouping (n=11); resource room teachers (n=8); and gifted education teacher serving as a resource in the regular classroom (n=7).

### Factors Affecting the Decision of Minority Teachers to Work With Gifted Students

What factors (administrative, academic, personal, social--friends, family, colleagues) influence the decision of minority teachers to work with gifted students? Which factor(s) has/have the greatest influence? How do factors affecting the decision to become a teacher of gifted students differ from factors affecting the decision not to become a teacher of gifted students?

Six teachers shared their stories regarding why they decided to become a teacher of gifted students. Six themes were generated based on teachers' comments: (a) colleague encouragement and support; (b) administrative support (most often principal); (c) negative experiences in special education; (d) exposure to and experience in working with gifted students with special needs; (e) interest in gifted students; and (f) desire to demonstrate that minority teachers are qualified to teach gifted students.

Twenty-three teachers shared their stories regarding factors affecting their decision not be become a teacher of gifted students. Four themes were evident: (a) lack of interest—other students have more needs than gifted students; (b) the belief that all children are gifted; (c) lack of opportunity because of lack of district support and/or gifted education services not offered; and (d) lack of administrative support.

## Summary and Discussion

Most of the minority teachers in the study identified themselves as Black or African American, and most are elementary teachers or middle school teachers working in urban school districts. Most respondents work in a predominantly White school district. Although most of the minority teachers reported more than 10 years of teaching experience, they have considerably less teaching experience in gifted education. That is, 15 teachers reported less than one year of experience teaching gifted students, while 13 reported 1 to 3 years of gifted education teaching experience.

In terms of services offered to gifted students, it appears that districts offer more services than the teachers report providing. This finding should be interpreted with caution since 52% of the teachers reported that they do not work in gifted education programs.

Interestingly, while 42% of the teachers reported that they currently work with gifted students, few shared their reasons. More teachers discussed why they had *not* become teachers of gifted students.

Social reasons for becoming teachers of gifted students included support and encouragement from colleagues and administration. Personal reasons included an interest in gifted students, primarily curiosity and intrigue about these students, and a determination to demonstrate that minority teachers can be competent gifted education teachers.

Interestingly, a consistent finding in studies on teachers' career choices point to negative perceptions about teachers—lack of prestige, low salary, etc. The minority teachers in this study did not reveal these concerns. Many teachers pointed to a lack of opportunity and lack of administrative support. Thus, such decisions to teach gifted students appear to be reactive and externally influenced rather than proactive.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to suggestions for increasing the recruitment and retention of minority teachers in gifted education.

1. *Expose, encourage, and support minority students during middle and high school.* Teachers and counselors will need to encourage minority students to consider a teaching career in general and gifted education in particular.
2. *Expose, encourage, and support minority groups during pre-service training.* Future teachers require exposure to gifted education relative to identification and assessment, curriculum and instruction, and social and emotional needs/development.
3. *Expose, encourage, and support minority teachers during teaching career.* Minority teachers should be encouraged to pursue a specialization or certification/endorsement in gifted education, as well as given the opportunity to attend conferences and workshops in gifted education.

## Conclusions

To date, a literature review produced no studies or articles that specifically address the under-representation of minority teachers in gifted education programs. The current study sought to address this void, to shed light on factors influencing the decision of minority teachers to become or not become teachers of gifted students. The minority teachers in this study did not identify commonly discussed barriers to entering education (e.g., salary, prestige, lack of parental support, lack of student cooperation, inadequate advising and counseling, poor test scores). Nor did the respondents discuss commonly identified factors that encourage their decision to enter education (e.g., encouragement from teacher or family, scholarships and financial assistance).

Although a national study, the findings are limited due to the small sample size. Future studies must be conducted with larger numbers of teachers. Nonetheless, a critical factor identified in this study and others is the need for increased administrators and school districts to encourage minority groups to enter gifted education. Recruiting minority groups into gifted education requires providing them with gifted education exposure and experience throughout their educational and professional experiences.

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# Factors Affecting the Career Decision Making of Minority Teachers in Gifted Education

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## Introduction

As the nation and our schools become increasingly diverse, educators have had to find ways to respond affirmatively to changing demographics. Reform reports abound on the need to reform education, particularly in school settings that have large percentages of ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse learners. While most of the responses and suggestions for reform target achievement-related issues (improving test scores, decreasing dropout rates, etc.), a relatively small (but increasing) body of work targets the need to increase the representation of minority teachers in educational settings.

The focus on teacher diversity is most evident in the general education literature, where a consistent body of work indicates that minority groups are sorely under-represented in the teaching profession (e.g., American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1994, 1995; Dilworth, 1990). Comparatively speaking, little attention has focused on the presence of minority teachers in gifted education. This study seeks to address this void. It looks at factors affecting the decision of minority groups to become teachers in gifted education.

## Review of the Literature

Educators, researchers, and policy makers have accumulated a massive amount of data on the scarcity of minority group representation in the teaching profession. The fact is that an inverse relationship exists over time between the percentage of minority students and minority teachers. Although minority students represent a large percentage of the school population (about 41%), less than 15% of the teaching profession is African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American combined. More specifically, in the teaching field, the Hispanic/Latino teacher representation is 3.1%, the Asian-Pacific Islander representation is 1%, the Black teacher representation is 9.2%, and the Native-American and Native-Alaskan teacher representation is .7% (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994; Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Few reports project an increase in the representation of minority teachers, despite the high demand for teachers in general and minority teachers in particular. Rather, there has been a steady decline of Black teachers between 1970 and 1986, and slight increases in 1991 and 1994 (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994). Projections indicate that minority students will comprise almost half (46%) of all public school students by 2020 (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; National Center for Education Statistics, 1994). Yet, this rise in minority students is unmatched by a proportional increase in minority teachers.

The recruitment and retention of minority teachers in education has already received extensive attention in general and special education. Specifically, between 1983 and 1990, many reform reports discussed the shortage of minority teachers, and proposed an agenda to recruit and retain more minority teachers. Today, with the large representation of minority students in urban schools and the under-representation of minority teachers,

educators and policy makers must seriously examine the reasons minority groups do not enter the teaching profession.

## Recruitment and Retention Factors

Historically and currently, minority groups have held steadfast to the belief that education is the most prominent factor in improving one's life circumstances. Education is considered a critical factor in promoting social change and improving one's quality of life (King, 1993). For instance, in 1989, the Joint Center for Political Studies (JCPS) stated that this long-standing regard for education within the Black community emphasizes "education for liberation, citizenship, and personal and collective power and advancement" (p. 12). The drive to attain higher levels of education among many minority groups was translated into many entering the teaching field because it represented an important value and was an accessible, respected profession. Essentially, minority teachers often enter teaching for the socio-psychological benefits and intrinsic reasons, but they are now difficult to recruit and retain (King, 1993). Several reasons help to explain this decrease and subsequent shortage of minority teachers. As described below, most barriers relate to recruitment.

### Recruitment Factors

The number of minorities who aspire to teach is declining (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994; Dilworth, 1990; Gonzalez, 1997). Between 1975 and 1985, there was a decline of 66% in the number of African Americans who became teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Because other disciplines aggressively recruit minority students, particularly in the hard sciences and math-related disciplines, fewer minority students are entering teaching. Relatedly, law, business, and other disciplines offer more prestige and financial incentives than does education. Particularly appealing to minority students are science, engineering, mathematics, medicine, and dentistry (Dilworth, 1990).

As part of two larger studies, Ford asked gifted Black students in grades 5 and 6 (1993) and grades 6 through 9 (1996a) about their vocational aspirations. In the 1993 study, only one out of 48 gifted Black students aspired to teach (2%), 14 wanted to become lawyers (33%), another 14 wanted to become doctors (33%). In the more recent study of 44 gifted Black students, eight aspired to become primarily doctors (29%) and five wanted to become lawyers (18%). Again, only one gifted Black student wanted to become a teacher (2%). Thus, in two different studies with 92 gifted Black students, only *two* wanted to become teachers. The limited research and writing on minority teacher representation in gifted education suggests the need for such a study. Further, the educational pipeline has fewer prospective minority college students, thereby reducing the overall supply of minority teachers.

A second recruitment barrier is that overall college participation rates by minorities continue to be below that of White students. King (1993) summarized findings from several studies of minority students who received bachelor degrees in education between 1976 and 1990 and noted the following changes: Latinos (less than 1% increase), Asian Americans (a 22% increase), and Native Americans (a 20% decrease).

A third recruitment barrier is the low graduation rate of minorities from higher education; specifically, few minority college students persist in teacher education programs. The number of minority preservice students graduating from educational programs in colleges and universities is approximately 14% of the total number of students who graduated (Morgan & Broyles, 1994). According to Morgan and Broyles, minority

students' interest and persistence in teaching decrease when they feel under-prepared to work with urban school realities. These students soon find alternative college majors and career choices.

Fourth, poor or negative experiences as K-12 and postsecondary students may discourage minority students from pursuing teaching as a career (e.g., poor student-teacher relationships, inadequate career guidance, and counseling). At the postsecondary level, Gordon (1994) found a lack of teacher diversity, a lack of academic preparation, and inadequate advising and support as barriers to recruiting and retaining minority teachers. Black students who feel misunderstood, unaccepted, and disrespected by their teachers are less likely to have positive relationships with teachers. These negative relations decrease teachers' expectations and students' motivation and achievement.

A final recruitment barrier is that education relies heavily on tests for screening, evaluation, and hiring decisions (Gordon, 1994; Kennedy, 1991). Minority students tend not to perform well on standardized tests, thus, they are screened out of teaching careers. Assessment data from the National Teachers' Examination (NTE) has confirmed the disproportionately high number of minority teaching candidates who fail to pass this examination (Bianchini, Kimble, Pitcher, Sullivan, & Wright, 1995). Approximately one-eighth of the 140 respondents interviewed by Gordon (1994) indicated that the additional educational requirements necessary for certification precluded their decision to enter teaching.

**Recruitment of Teachers in Gifted Education**

Few pre-service programs offer the opportunity for training in gifted education, so few teachers are likely to think of that area of specialization or to have the opportunity to prepare for this specialization. However, recruitment into this specialty rests largely on experiences after graduation from college.

Just as important, minority teachers are often assigned to special education and low-ability group teaching positions (Shapiro, Loeb, & Bowermaster, 1993). These assignments hinder the opportunity of minority teachers to work in gifted education. Specifically, according to Shapiro, Loeb, and Bowermaster (1993), these placements push minority teachers away from gifted education.

**Retention Factors**

Black and other minority teachers are more likely than others to leave the teaching profession at higher and faster rates. Teachers, in general, evince a high attrition rate, estimated between 20% and 25% for beginning teachers, and between 33% and 50% for teachers in their first five years (Harris & Metropolitan Life Foundation, 1988). Trends indicate that high school teachers, male teachers, inner-city urban teachers, and Black and Latino teachers are more likely to leave the profession than others (Harris & Metropolitan Life Foundation, 1988). In his study of minority teachers' perceptions of teaching, Garibaldi (1991) reported that salary was a deterrent for 78% of respondents, the lack of parental support was a deterrent for 66%, and the lack of student cooperation was a deterrent for 59%. Respondents who perceived teaching more positively considered job security, job availability, and the opportunity to contribute to humanity (46%) as attractive and personally fulfilling. Further, their decisions (either positive or negative) to teach were influenced more by family members (43%) than by teachers. Namely, high school teachers influenced 21% of the respondents, and elementary teachers influenced 15% of them.

Further, minority teachers are more likely to begin teaching in large urban school districts where teaching conditions are particularly difficult (Gay, 1997). Chester and Beaudin (1996) reported that urban teachers leave the profession for at least four reasons: (a) poor collegiality and collaboration; (b) inadequate support from administrators; (c) inadequate resources and materials; and (d) limited observations of and evaluative advice regarding their teaching. Gonzalez (1997) reported similar barriers. These conditions often contribute to early and high burnout rates owing to a lack of resources and supplies, overcrowded classes, non-teaching responsibilities, as well as high drop-out rates, teenage pregnancies, drugs, and violence among students (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

In sum, problems affecting the recruitment and retention of minorities in teaching relate mainly to these eight factors: (a) testing and screening; (b) more aggressive recruitment by other disciplines that hold more prestige; (c) low high school and college graduation rates; (d) poor or negative K-12 and post-secondary educational experiences; (e) over-placement in poor, urban schools and low-achieving classes; (f) a lack of career or vocational guidance regarding teaching; (g) a lack of preparation in urban education; and (h) a lack of preparation in multicultural education.

**The Need for Diverse Teachers: Culturally Responsive Classrooms**

Concerns abound regarding the need to diversify the teaching profession. Various explanations have been advanced regarding the need to increase the presence of minority teachers in education. Specifically, considerable evidence suggests that minority teachers play many roles for minority and White students. Works by Delpit (1995), Ladson-Billings (1994), and Foster (1990) suggest that Black teachers are adept at mentoring and advocating for minority students, and they are effective at providing culturally responsive learning environments. Sharing the same or similar cultural backgrounds with their minority students, minority teachers are able to understand the learning styles and cultural styles of minority students (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Foster, 1990; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). Just as important, minority students profess that they identify more with school when the have minority teachers (Gonzalez, 1997). Part of this explanation rests in the reality that minority teachers share many of their students' experiences; thus, minority teachers are able to identify with their minority students. One teacher in Gonzalez's (1997) study states: "They don't say this openly, but many professors of education haven't had the experience of working in these (inner city) schools themselves. We (the teachers) know a lot more about life in those communities than they do (p. 59).

Research on exemplary teaching strategies for minority students has been the focus of increasing scholarship in the last decade. Delpit (1995), Ladson-Billings (1994), Irvine and York (1995), and Shade, Kelly, and Oberg (1997), for example, have devoted considerable attention to those strategies deemed ineffective and effective with diverse students. Their works suggest that many teachers are unprepared or under-prepared to work with students whose culture[1] differs from their own. This lack of understanding often leads to misperceptions and stereotypes about students from diverse cultures. A negative outcome of misunderstandings is low expectations.

Perceptions of cultural and racial diversity can take several forms. Educators can view culture from a deficit perspective, as noted by such terms as "culturally disadvantaged" or "culturally deprived." These terms were common to social and academic parlance prior to the 1970s. The terms reflect a belief or value system in which the

[1] Banks (1988) defines culture as the set of values, symbols, perspectives, and behaviors that distinguish one group from another.

mainstream culture is held up as the norm (or normal) and deviations are viewed as dysfunctional or deficient in some way. For instance, children who speak Black English Vernacular (non-standard English) may be perceived as cognitively and culturally inferior. These children are perceived as "at risk" for school failure, and lacking the cultural capital to succeed in traditional settings. In some cases, educators who hold this belief system may make no attempt to help minority students to maneuver unfamiliar cultural obstacles. In essence, the burden for minority students' school failure rests in their culture, home, and community.

During the 1980s, the notion of cultural differences became more common, replacing (in some ways) the cultural deficit perspective. This belief holds that people reared in different environments will necessarily be different. Unlike the cultural deficit perspective, the cultural difference perspective does not hold a "better than thou" belief. Different cultures are seen as parallel or co-cultures. Those who hold the cultural difference orientation wish to eradicate these differences for the sake of a common culture, and because of the belief that differences can result in negative social and cultural outcomes. Of course, without some degree of assimilation, culturally diverse groups have little cultural capital. However, teaching that merely prepares students to fit into society is not helpful in building a democratic and just society (Banks & Banks, 1995).

Regardless of the view that is held, it is difficult to deny that differences exist. In general, these misperceptions, stereotypes, and low expectations can be explained from the perspective of the "cultural mismatch" theory. This theory suggests that when critical components of teaching and learning between students and teachers are not culturally congruent, there can be negative outcomes for students—underachievement and dropping out, for example. Irvine and York (1990) reported that cultural mismatch relates to: (a) student-teacher relationships; (b) learning contexts; (c) teacher expectations; and (d) instruction. Essentially, cultural mismatch impacts how teachers and other school personnel interpret the behaviors and performance of diverse students. For example, a counselor may misinterpret a minority student's quietness as shyness, when the student's culture values listening and non-verbal communication. Likewise, a psychologist may misinterpret a minority student's low verbal scores. The child may be viewed as "non-verbal," when English is the child's second language.

Decades ago, Vygotsky (1931) examined the role that culture plays in learning. He maintained that various psychological tools that people use to aid in their thinking are called "signs." "We cannot understand human thinking without examining the signs that cultures provide" (pp. 39-40). Applying this concept to a school setting, it seems clear that educators must recognize the cultural signs that minority students bring to school, and make assessment, curriculum, and instruction more compatible with these signs. Jordan (1985) observed that

> Educational practices must match with the children's culture in ways which ensure the generation of academically important behaviors. It does not mean that all school practices need to be completely congruent with natal cultural practices in the sense of exactly or even closely matching or agreeing with them. (p. 110)

Jordan goes on to say that "the point of cultural compatibility is that the natal culture is used as a guide in the selection of educational program elements so that academically desired behaviors are produced and undesired behaviors are resolved" (p. 110). Considering the impact the minority teachers can have on students, the need to recruit and retain minority teachers seems clear and urgent.

## Implications for Gifted Education

As stated on several occasions, one of the most stubborn problems in American education is the inability of our teacher education system to produce substantial numbers of teachers from racial, ethnic, and language minority groups (Ganzalez, 1997). While interest in teaching as a profession remains low nationally among all minority groups, there is consensus that the lack of representation of minority groups in the teaching profession is most egregious for Blacks, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans (Gonzalez, 1997; James, 1993). What are the implications of minority teacher under-representation for gifted education?

The representation of minority teachers in gifted programs has received inadequate attention in the literature, while considerable literature has focused on increasing the representation of minority students in gifted education (e.g., Ford, 1994, 1996a; Frasier, García, & Passow, 1995; Frasier & Passow, 1994). If such efforts to increase the representation of minority students in gifted education are effective, a corresponding need will arise for increasing the presence of minority teachers in gifted education. For instance, Serwatka, Deering, and Stoddard (1989) found that as the percentage of Black teachers increases, the representation of Black students in gifted education increases. They suggest that a primary factor in the successful identification of gifted Black students is positive teacher attitudes, cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity. Hall and Udall (1983) reported that racially and culturally diverse students were less likely than White students to be referred by teachers for gifted programs. They attributed this referral differential to teachers' attitudes and expectations. For example, teachers frequently emphasize such behaviors as cooperation, punctuality, and neatness when identifying gifted students. These often are not the behaviors minority students instinctively demonstrate, primarily because of differences in cultural behaviors, communication styles, and cultural values and norms (see Boykin, 1994; Ford, 1996b; Ford & Harris, 1999; Ogbu, 1990).

Similarly, a mismatch often occurs between the learning characteristics of gifted minority students and those listed on the many checklists that teachers complete. An examination of several nomination forms and checklists indicate that: the characteristics of underachieving and minority students are noticeably absent; they frequently lack national and (perhaps more importantly) local normative data; and they focus almost exclusively on academic and cognitive characteristics of giftedness, while ignoring affective and cultural characteristics (Ford, 1996b; Ford & Harris, 1999). Sensitive and well-prepared teachers can help mitigate low expectations of minority students, which might well increase referrals of minority students for gifted programs.

Since teacher referrals and recommendations play a major role in the identification of gifted students, Ford (1994, 1996b) has contended that White teachers may under-refer Black students for gifted education because of their cultural differences and related misunderstandings. Because of their cultural similarities, however, minority teachers may be better able to identify the strengths and potential of otherwise overlooked minority students. Ultimately, a ripple-effect may occur—the representation of minority students in gifted education may increase with an increase in minority teachers. The recruitment and retention issues just discussed highlight the need for a study exploring factors affecting the decision of minority teachers in gifted education. In seeking to fill this void, the current study sought to address three research questions:

1. What services do school districts and teachers provide to gifted students? To what extent are teachers providing services not offered by the district?
2. What factors (administrative, academic, personal, social—friends, family, colleagues) influence the decision of minority teachers to work with gifted

students? Which factor(s) has/have the greatest influence? How do factors affecting the decision to become a teacher of gifted students differ from factors affecting the decision not to become a teacher of gifted students?

3. How does career decision making differ relative to (a) different minority groups (e.g., Hispanic, Asian, Black)? (b) males and females? and (c) teachers in urban, rural, and suburban districts?

## Methodology

### Sample

Five hundred schools were chosen from the national list of schools in the Institutional Studies Data, Public School New Address File (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994). The schools were assigned random numbers and 10 schools were randomly selected from each state.

In July of 1996, school principals at the 500 schools were mailed a letter explaining the study. They were asked to complete and return a postcard indicating the number of minority teachers in their school building. This figure indicated the number of surveys to be mailed to the school. One hundred and seventeen postcards were returned by principals, indicating that there were 525 minority teachers in 53 schools. Sixty-four principals reported that they did not have minority teachers in their school.

Next, the surveys were mailed to the principals with a request to distribute the surveys to the designated number of minority teachers. A total of 525 surveys were mailed. In addition to the survey, teachers received a letter explaining the purpose of the survey and a self-addressed return envelope. Forty-four teachers returned the survey (see Table 1). Thirty-nine teachers (89%) were female, and almost three-fourths (n=32) were Black. Two teachers identified themselves as White, four indicated Hispanic American, four indicated Asian American, and two listed "other." More than half of the teachers work in urban school districts (n=26, 59%); one-third (n=14) work in rural districts, and four (9%) work in suburban districts. The districts' minority student populations varied. That is, 59% of teachers (n=26) reported that less than 10% of the district was minority; 32% (n=14) reported that 51 to 75% were minority; and four (9%) reported that minority students comprised from 10 to 25% of the school district.

Almost half of the teachers indicated that they were between 41 and 50 years of age. Four were 21 to 30; six were 31 to 40; eight were 51-60; and four indicated that they were 61 or older. Three-fourths of the respondents have taught more than 10 years (n=33); eight (18%) have taught between 5 and 10 years; and three (7%) have taught less than five years. When asked: "Do you currently provide services to gifted students?", 56% responded "no" (n=24) and 42% (n=18) responded "yes." Participants were asked how long they had taught gifted students. Thirteen teachers did not respond. Of the 31 who did respond, 15 (55%) reported less than one year, 13 (42%) reported 1 to 3 years, and one reported 4 to 6 years. No teachers reported more than 6 years of teaching experience.

Table 1

Characteristics of Sample by Demographic Variables (n=44)

| Demographic variable | Frequencies | |
|---|---|---|
| Race | Black | (n=32) |
| | Hispanic American | (n= 4) |
| | Asian American | (n= 4) |
| | White | (n= 2) |
| | Other | (n= 2) |
| Gender | Male | (n= 5) |
| | Female | (n=39) |
| Age | 21-30 | (n= 4) |
| | 31-40 | (n= 6) |
| | 41-50 | (n=21) |
| | 51-60 | (n= 8) |
| | 61 or more | (n= 4) |
| Geographic locale | Urban | (n=26) |
| | Rural | (n=14) |
| | Suburban | (n= 4) |
| Level of education | Associate's | (n= 5) |
| | Bachelor's | (n=39) |
| | Master's | (n=26) |
| | Specialist | (n= 4) |
| | Doctorate | (n= 1) |
| Years of teaching experience | 1-5 years | (n= 3) |
| | 5-10 years | (n= 8) |
| | more than 10 years | (n=33) |
| Currently teaching in gifted education | no | (n=24) |
| | yes | (n=18) |
| Years of gifted education teaching experience | Less than 1 year | (n=17) |
| | 1-3 years | (n=13) |
| | 4-6 years | (n= 1) |
| Grade levels taught | Preschool | (n= 3) |
| | Elementary | (n=15) |
| | Middle school | (n=15) |
| | High school | (n= 6) |
| Subjects taught | Math | (n=24) |
| | English | (n=15) |
| | Science | (n=32) |
| | Social | (n=21) |
| | Other | (n=26) |

Five teachers reported having an Associate's degree; their degrees were earned between 1979 and 1986. Most teachers (n=39) reported having a Bachelor's degree; their degrees were earned between 1957 and 1994. Twenty-six reported having a Master's degree; their degrees were earned between 1957 and 1997. Four teachers hold a Specialist degree, which was earned between 1986 and 1994. Finally, one teacher reported having a doctoral degree, which was earned in 1976.

Most of the respondents taught elementary and middle school students (n=15, 38% for each). Six teachers (15%) taught high school, and three (8%) taught preschool

students. In terms of subjects taught, most teachers teach more than one subject: 55% teach math (n=24), 34% teach English (n=15), 73% teach science (n=32), 48% teach social studies (n=21), and 59% indicated that they teach other subjects (n=26).

### Instrumentation

The survey contains 40 items and takes approximately one hour to complete. It is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on gifted education options offered by the respondent's district and whether the respondent personally provides such services. This section contains 27 items. Respondents check whether the services listed in this section are provided by (a) the district or (b) themselves as classroom teachers. The last item in this section gives participants an opportunity to indicate other gifted education services provided to students, but not listed on the survey. Responses to this section were coded as: 1 "district provides service"; 2 "respondent provides service"; 3 "district and respondent provide service"; and 4 "neither district nor respondent provides service."

The second section was designed to gather qualitative information on factors that affected the teachers' decisions to become or not become a teacher of gifted students. Thus, participants were given an opportunity to share their "story." Teachers working with gifted students were asked to respond to part A of this section. They were given the following directions: "Please describe the process you went through in deciding to become a teacher of gifted students. Tell us your story as best you can recall. We are interested in factors, persons, and events that affected your decision. Provide as much detail as possible so that we can get a complete picture of your decision making. (Use the back of this sheet if necessary)." Teachers not working with gifted students were asked to respond to part B. "Please describe the process you went through in deciding *not* to become a teacher of gifted students. Tell us your story as best you can recall. We are interested in factors, persons, and events that affected your decision. Provide as much detail as possible so that we can get a complete picture of your decision making."

In the final section (11 items), respondents were asked to provide information on their educational background and preparation in gifted education, as well as demographic information (age, gender, race, etc.). The teachers were asked, for example, to indicate the degrees earned and the year of each degree, as well as their major. They indicated the grade level and subjects taught, length of teaching experience, type of school district in which they teach (i.e., urban suburban, rural), and the percentage of minority students in their district (see Appendix).

### Data Analysis

Section one, which explored services offered to gifted students by districts and respondents, was analyzed using frequency analyses. The second section, which examined teachers' stories of factors influencing their decision to become or not become a teacher of gifted students, was analyzed for themes. The small sample size prevented comparative analyses, which was the objective of the third research question.

## Results

### Services Offered to Gifted Students by District and Respondent

What services do school districts and teachers provide to gifted students? To what extent are teachers providing services not offered by the district? Teachers indicated

whether the service listed was offered or not offered by their district, and whether they teach or offer the services themselves. The results appear in Table 2.

### Summer Enrichment Classes

Twenty-four teachers reported that their districts provide summer enrichment classes for gifted students. However, only three teachers reported that they are involved in summer enrichment. Seventeen teachers reported that this service was not provided to gifted students.

Table 2

Services Offered for Gifted Students by Districts and Teachers (n=44)

| Services for gifted students | Services for gifted students offered by my district | | I teach or offer services for gifted students in this area | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Summer enrichment classes | 24 | 17 | 3 | 0 |
| Saturday/weekend classes | 8 | 35 | 1 | 0 |
| Mentorships, internships | 13 | 25 | 6 | 0 |
| Early kindergarten admission | 9 | 35 | 0 | 0 |
| College courses for high school students | 25 | 19 | 0 | 0 |
| College credit for high school courses | 21 | 22 | 1 | 0 |
| Opportunities for high school students to go to college and take classes | 21 | 20 | 3 | 0 |
| Full-time magnet school or school based program | 23 | 21 | 0 | 0 |
| Part-time magnet school or school based program | 9 | 35 | 0 | 0 |
| Ability grouping | 18 | 15 | 11 | 0 |
| Enrichment in the regular classroom | 16 | 8 | 20 | 0 |
| Curricular modifications in the regular classroom delivered in a planned, sustained basis | 11 | 20 | 13 | 0 |
| Resource rooms | 16 | 20 | 8 | 0 |
| Courses added to a student's load (e.g., honors seminars, early bird classes) | 19 | 23 | 2 | 0 |
| Clubs and extracurricular activities | 20 | 11 | 14 | 0 |
| Field trips | 19 | 11 | 14 | 0 |
| Special televised courses | 14 | 30 | 0 | 0 |
| Self-instructional materials and systems (e.g., correspondence study) | 12 | 29 | 3 | 0 |
| Gifted education teacher serving as a resource in the regular classroom | 14 | 23 | 7 | 0 |
| Acceleration within the regular classroom | 11 | 19 | 14 | 0 |
| Grade acceleration | 17 | 24 | 3 | 0 |
| Advanced placement program | 21 | 22 | 1 | 0 |
| Honors or advanced classes in all subjects | 19 | 20 | 5 | 0 |
| Honors or advanced classes in some subjects | 20 | 22 | 2 | 0 |
| International baccalaureate | 10 | 32 | 2 | 0 |
| Other (specify): | 3 | 40 | 1 | 0 |

### Enrichment in the Regular Classroom

Sixteen teachers responded that their district supports the provision of enrichment in the regular classroom for gifted students; 20 teachers reported that the district requires and they provide such services. Eight teachers reported that gifted students in their district are not serviced this way.

### Acceleration Within the Regular Classroom

Most teachers (n=19) reported that their district does not provide acceleration in the regular classroom. However, 11 teachers reported that their district offers this option. Fourteen teachers indicated that they provide acceleration.

### Grade Acceleration

According to 24 teachers, their district does not offer grade acceleration for gifted students; 17 other teachers reported otherwise.

### Advanced Placement Program

While 22 teachers stated that their district does not have an advanced placement program, another 21 reported that advanced placement is offered by their district.

### All Honors or Advanced Classes

Although 20 teachers reported that their district does not offer honors or advanced placement in all subjects, another 19 noted that their district does offer these classes. Five teachers reported working in these classes.

### Some Honors or Advanced Classes

For this item, 22 teachers reported that their district does not offer honors or advanced placement in some subjects; conversely, 20 other teachers noted that their district does offer these classes.

### Ability Grouping

Eighteen teachers reported that their school uses ability grouping for gifted students; 15 indicated that their district does not use ability grouping to serve gifted students; and 11 teachers reporting grouping students by ability.

### Curricular Modifications

Eleven teachers reported that their district requires curricular modifications for gifted students in the regular classroom to be delivered on a planned, sustained basis; 13 teachers modify the curriculum for gifted students in their classrooms. However, according to 20 teachers, curricular modifications are not offered for gifted students in their district.

### Saturday/Weekend Classes

According to eight teachers, their district provides Saturday or weekend classes for gifted students; two teachers also reported providing such services in their classrooms. Thirty-five teachers indicated that this service was not provided.

**Mentorships/Internships**

Thirteen teachers indicated that their district provides mentorships and internships for gifted students; six teachers also reported providing such services in their classrooms. Twenty-five teachers indicated that this service was not provided by their district.

**Early Entrance**

Most teachers (n=35) reported that their school district does not permit students to enter kindergarten early. Nine indicated that their district permits early entrance.

**College Course Enrollment**

Twenty-five teachers noted that their district allows high school students to enroll in college courses. Nineteen indicated that students in their district cannot enroll in college courses.

**College Credit**

According to 21 teachers, high school students can take college courses for credit in their district; 22 teachers indicated that students cannot do so in their district.

**Opportunities for College**

Twenty-one teachers noted that high school students have opportunities to go to college and to take college courses. Twenty teachers stated that this is not a service provided by their district.

**Full-Time Magnet**

Twenty-three teachers indicated that their district has a full-time magnet school for gifted student, while 21 indicated that their district did not have a full-time magnet school.

**Part-Time Magnet**

Most teachers (n=35) reported that their district did not have a part-time magnet school; however, 9 teachers indicated that their district had a part-time magnet school.

**Resource Rooms**

Almost half of the teachers (n=20) reported that their districts do not have resource rooms for gifted students. However, 16 teachers reported that their school provides this service; and eight teachers indicated that work in gifted education resource rooms.

**Gifted Teachers Serving as Resource in Regular Classrooms**

Twenty-three districts do not provide this service, according to teachers. Fourteen teachers reported that their school has gifted education teachers serving in this capacity, and seven indicated that they serve as the resource teacher in the regular classroom.

**International Baccalaureate Program**

Most teachers (n=32) stated that their school does not have an International Baccalaureate program. Ten teachers reported otherwise.

### Courses Added to Students' Load

Many teachers (n=23) indicated that gifted students cannot have courses added to their regular load. Conversely, 19 other teachers indicated that this is a service offered to gifted students.

### Clubs and Extracurricular Activities

According to 20 teachers, their school district offers clubs and extracurricular activities for gifted students. Fourteen teachers reported providing such services, while another 11 reported that this service is not provided by their district.

### Field Trips

Nineteen teachers noted that their district provides field trips for gifted students, compared to 11 districts that do not. Fourteen teachers indicated that they offer this service.

### Special Televised Courses

Most teachers (n=30) indicated that neither they nor their district offer special televised courses for gifted students. Fourteen teachers responded that their district has this service.

### Self-Instructional Materials and Systems

This service, which includes such options as correspondence study, was offered by 12 school districts. However, 29 districts do not offer self-instructional materials and systems.

### Other Services

Three teachers reported that their district offers gifted education services beyond those listed on the survey. These services were not identified by teachers. Two teachers reported offering other services themselves, but did not identify these services.

## Factors Affecting the Decision of Minority Teachers to Work With Gifted Students

What factors (administrative, academic, personal, social—friends, family, colleagues) influence the decision of minority teachers to work with gifted students? Which factor(s) has/have the greatest influence? How do factors affecting the decision to become a teacher of gifted students differ from factors affecting the decision not to become a teacher of gifted students?

### Part A—Decision to Become a Teacher of Gifted Students

Six teachers shared their stories regarding why they decided to become a teacher of gifted students. Six themes were generated based on teachers' comments: (a) colleague encouragement and support; (b) administrative support (most often principal); (c) negative experiences in special education; (d) exposure to and experience in working with gifted students with special needs; (e) interest in gifted students; and (f) desire to demonstrate that minority teachers are qualified to teach gifted students. Their comments follow:

Respondent 005—I've always been interested in working with advanced curriculum—by my definition that which requires advanced thinking skills rather than assimilation and regurgitation of isolated facts. Because, unfortunately, curriculum has been watered down so students get better grades and make the system look better, the ones who can handle what I want to teach are gifted or advanced students. At the time, I was finishing my Master's, I had 10 hours of electives left. A co-worker pointed out to me that our current social studies enrichment teacher was getting married and leaving. "Why don't you ask Mrs. G (our principal) for that job?" she asked me. So I did, finished my electives in gifted, took the required five more hours and put it on my specialists [sic], and rest, as they say, is history. That's been seven or eight years ago, and I love it! I'm pretty demanding, but fair; my students by and large do well; I'm proud of my program. (White female, 41-50 years old, suburban school, 10-25% minority district)

Respondent 006—After working in early childhood (K, 1) for almost twenty years, I had the opportunity provided by my district to teach in our gifted summer program "Summer of Bright Ideas." It was so exciting and diverse that I obtained my gifted certification. The first year, I taught gifted "push in" program, 1st grade. Next year with Georgia's new criteria for identifying gifted students, I will be a full-time gifted teacher, especially with primary students. (White female, 41-50 years old, suburban school, less than 10% minority)

Respondent 012—I began teaching gifted students at the request of my past principal. It was his way of indicating to me and to the rest of the school community (parents and staff) that I was a "good" teacher. I had taken some courses during my post-Master's time in this specialty area. Parents at my school had strongly requested that some of the minority staff become part of the gifted and talented. All minority staff prior to my being assigned were assigned to the lowest ability group students. (Black female, 41-50 years old, urban school, more than 75% minority district)

Respondent 013—I once substituted in a special education class. After that experience, I really wanted to work with gifted students. (Black female, 31-40 years old, urban school, 51-75% minority district)

Respondent 014—I am a counselor of the gifted and one of the counties gifted and talented program coordinators. As a Master's student I had extensive training in testing for both learning disabilities and gifted traits. When I entered the county, there was a need for a counselor of the gifted who could also screen students for eligibility for the program. Thus, we were a perfect match. (Black male, 21-30 years old, suburban school, 10-25% minority district)

Respondent 015—When course assignments were being given, the opportunity to teach two gifted and talented sections were offered to me. I had interned with a teacher who had gifted and talented classes and I enjoyed it tremendously. There was no hesitation to accept this opportunity. I did attend a workshop over the summer before my first year and that was very helpful and provided many resources. (Black female, 21-30 years old, suburban school, 26-50% minority district)

Respondent 016—My initial teaching contract position was teaching SED [severely emotionally disturbed] students. It became evident quickly that a number of the SED students were gifted—even by the district's standards. It was told to me that

"the only difference between GT and SED students was that the GT students' parents had money." That was a well-circulated joke in our building. This building housed two sections of "regular" education classes as well as the intermediate SED students from the district. We had our own wing and rarely mixed with others. There was also a section of GT classes in the building which drew qualified students from throughout the district. As mentioned, several of my students "qualified" for GT but only one made it into the GT class and that was only with *extra* support and counseling.

I had applied for other positions after my SED experiences of five plus years, including some GT classes, but was not hired for them in some cases or chose not to in other cases so I could work with a certain principal and staff. I have found that each class and each student, to varying degrees, is "gifted." It is my job to help them discover their giftedness and facilitate it. Form that perspective, I *do* teach GT classes. (Hispanic male, 31-40 years old, suburban school district, 10-25% minority district)

Respondent 019—While I am not certified to teach gifted students with AG certification, they have been a regular part of my class for all of my teaching years. There have been years when as many as one half of my classroom students were made up of gifted students. I enjoyed working with the AG teachers in planning units of study for these students and offering enrichment activities suited to the students' academic abilities. I have been asked to pursue AG certification because of my ability to challenge even the brightest elementary students in my classes. Ms. C. Reid, an AG teacher who has left the classroom felt strongly about me becoming certified in that area. I enjoy, immensely, the challenge that I endure, as well as the ones presented to the students! (Black female, 31-40 years old, urban school, 16-50% minority district)

Respondent 035—I really didn't have to go through a process in deciding to become a teacher of the gifted. I enjoy teaching students of all levels and kinds (the underachiever, overachiever, the gifted, the disadvantaged, and so on). Therefore, when the challenge and opportunity presented itself, I seized the chance to work with these students. (Black female, 41-50 years old, urban school, more than 75% minority district)

Respondent 036—I decided to become a teacher of gifted students in Future Problem Solving and Debate after taking workshops and classes. I felt that our children should be exposed to the gifted things that could be taught and learned with students who have these abilities. (Black female, 61+ years old, urban school, more than 75% minority district)

Respondent 044—There is subtle racism very prevalent in the school system in which I work. Most administrators, teachers, and parents are in denial as to its existence. Because of this, progress in certain areas of education has been hindered. I got into the gifted portion of exceptional children's program by insisting that I would "fight" if I were not included. Let me explain my reason for being so adamant and "assertive." Heretofore, minority (mainly African-American) teachers were only included in the portion of the exceptional children's program that dealt with slow learners, learners with learning difficulties in specific areas, mentally handicapped, and emotionally handicapped. I feel that this is true because we are considered incapable of teaching gifted students.

Another reason for my entering this program is that early in my teaching career I had the opportunity to teach what was called at that time "accelerated learners" and I thoroughly enjoyed this. My third reason for entering this program is, until *very* recently, only a "select" group of teachers, not including minority teachers, were allowed to teach "gifted" students as they completed certification for this area. It is now available to minority teachers, by force, and I am working on my certification in this area as I teach gifted students in math/science.

. . . I really believe that my administration is not aware of these indicators. Out of a faculty of 59 teachers and three teacher aide positions, there are 16 teachers of gifted students and I am the only minority teacher. The student body is 30 or 40% minority. I teach 52 students and only one minority student in that group has been labeled gifted. Out of the faculty of 59, *only five* are minorities. (Black female, 51-60 years old, rural school, 26-50% minority district)

Respondent 043—I was selected to provide these services. However, I must admit that from the onset I had misgivings about the program because I am not totally in favor of labeling students. It has proven to be a joy. (Black female, 41-50 years old, rural school)

Respondent 046—This program is a special program for ESL children. I have been certified (endorsement) to instruct ESL children. Have taken various courses in culture, Spanish, reading strategies, writing strategies, and multicultural literature. I was raised in a bilingual home which I feel as a great tool in inspiring me to become an ESL teacher. (Hispanic female, 41-50, rural school, 26-50% minority district)

**Part B—Decision Not to Become a Teacher of Gifted Students**

Twenty-three teachers shared their stories regarding factors affecting their decision not be become a teacher of gifted students. Four themes were evident: (a) lack of interest—other students have more need than gifted students; (b) the belief that all children are gifted; (c) lack of opportunity because of lack of district support and/or gifted education services not offered; and (d) lack of administrative support. Their comments follow:

Respondent 003—At the school, I started out at and am presently employed, I had a pull out program for the academically gifted student. I was hired in as a 6th grade teacher and after three years had moved down to grade 1. Since having been in grade 1 for 4 years, our school decided to start the gifted and talented program in only grades 4 to 6 and the regular teacher would provide for the GT students. Prior to that GT was provided from K-6th grade, which I thought was great.

I never became or ever entertained the idea of being a teacher of the gifted because our school is very small and there is only one teacher per grade level. And usually the IRA person would have the opportunity to become a GT teacher. (Asian female, 41-50 years old, suburban school, 10-25% minority school district)

Respondent 004—The district's position has been to provide in the regular classroom for gifted children. But no one provided training for regular education teachers to provide enrichment activities. (Asian female, 41-50 years old, suburban school, less than 10% minority district)

Respondent 007—I chose librarianship as a career; however, I feel that librarians/media specialists must serve all students. Throughout the years, it has

been my goal to get the appropriate materials to the right students at the right time. (Black female, 61+ years old, urban school, 26-50% minority)

Respondent 009—I attended several seminars dealing with enrichment of high potential students 15 - 20 years ago because I discovered that I had students in need of enrichment challenge. Those seminars provided a foundation, interest to further pursue the challenge of working with these students. I took college courses, attended many seminars dealing with the education of gifted students. I read many articles on the subject so that I would be better prepared and able to maintain skills so that I could work effectively and make learning meaningful for these students. I continue to learn as much as I can by reading literature on the subject, taking classes, and taking on the challenge of working with high ability and gifted students. I develop curriculum, formed before school, after school clubs, mini courses for their enrichment. I use the higher order thinking skills in my daily teaching and provided students questioning and tasks and maintain learning centers which contain open-ended and enrichment tasks. (Caribbean/African female, 51-60 years old, suburban school, less than 10% minority district)

Respondent 011—I decided as a teacher that I could make an impact on more children by not being a teacher of gifted students. The greater population of students falls out of the gifted area. I hoped as a regular teacher to interest and affect students to try harder and realize how important their choices are. Regular and special education students need more encouragement and belief in them, and I feel I have that to give to them and possibly make a challenge in their lives. (Black female, 41-50 years old, urban school, 26-50% minority district)

Respondent 020—I have a B.S. in elementary education. Opportunity has never arrived to teach gifted. (Black male, 31-40 years old, urban school, more than 75% minority district)

Respondent 022—Since teaching in high school, I have not been offered the opportunity to teach gifted students nor the classes to prepare to teach them. (Black female, 41-50 years old, suburban school, 10-25% minority district)

Respondent 023—I teach all students, because I am a media coordinator. The gifted students are mixed in with the other students in the class. (Black female, 51-60 years old, urban school, 26-50% minority district)

Respondent 024—I've always been curious about the "gifted child." Their behavior has always puzzled me. How could a child be so bright, yet so dizzy? I would find time to talk with teachers of gifted students, they would tell me that this behavior was typical of some gifted students. However, it was not my decision to become a teacher of the gifted.

Our teacher was resigning her post and it (the job) was given to me by the division superintendent. Since being given that position, I've enrolled in UVA's endorsement program in gifted education. Those courses have helped me a lot. I've gained a wealth of knowledge about these children and their needs. The video clippings of teachers working with the gifted have been very helpful. Many ideas that I use have come from the readings we do in class. I truly haven't decided that this is my calling. I've read a lot, worked with students, and consulted with other teachers about their students. I now realize that working with gifted students is a real challenge. I still teach the gifted and probably will for a few more years. However, my real zest is to be in the regular classroom helping the less intelligent

student reach their potential. (Black female, 41-50 years old, rural school, 26-50% minority district)

Respondent 031—I wouldn't want to teach gifted classes because I see it as "tracking." I have been in schools where some of those kinds of students thought they were superior to the other students. Gifted students, in my opinion, should be in the classroom with the regular student as an incentive. (Black female, 51-60 years old, urban school, 26-50% minority district)

Respondent 037—There was no opportunity for me to become a teacher of gifted students. There were no known special programs. (Black female, 41-50 years old, urban school, 51-75% minority district)

Respondent 038—I didn't purposely decide not to become a teacher of gifted students. It just happened that when I signed my contract, I was assigned to a non-gifted school or a school that didn't have gifted education classes. (Black female, 41-50 years old, urban school, 51-75% minority district)

Respondent 040—I am not a teacher of gifted students as far as academics. However, I do teach a stock market and entrepreneurship class to students that have gifted students in the classroom. (Black female, 41-50 years old, urban school, more than 75% minority district)

Respondent 045—I never considered becoming a teacher of gifted students. It was/is not an option for me because of lack of interest. (Black female, 21-30 years old, urban school, 51-75% minority district)

Respondent 047—As a student in elementary and high school, I was usually bored with the regular curriculum. Two high school teachers encouraged me to excel and a college professor provided a great role model. As a result, I was encouraged to apply for a scholarship abroad—I came to the USA to finish my Master's degree, got married, had kids, started my Ph.D. My parents were both teachers and my father especially wanted me to be a doctor (MD). I compromised and gave him a Ph.D. instead. Actually, I treat all my classes as a group of children with different *kinds* of *gifts*. So I challenge them all, even when I was assigned to teach the LEP (non-English, reading below grade level) group. (Asian female, 61+ years old, urban school, more than 75% minority district)

### Demographic Differences in Career Making Decisions

How does career decision making differ relative to (a) different minority groups (e.g., Hispanic, Asian, Black)? (b) males and females? and (c) teachers in urban, rural, and suburban districts. Due to the small sample size, limited number of males (n=5), and small percentage of Hispanic American, Asian American, and White respondents, comparative analyses could not be conducted.

## Summary and Discussion

Most of the minority teachers in the study identified themselves as Black or African American, and most are elementary or middle school teachers working in urban school districts. Most respondents work in a predominantly White school district. Although most of the minority teachers reported more than 10 years of teaching experience, they have

considerably less teaching experience in gifted education. That is, 15 teachers reported less than one year of experience teaching gifted students, while 13 reported 1 to 3 years of gifted education teaching experience.

In terms of services offered to gifted students, it appears that districts offer more services than the teachers report providing. This finding should be interpreted with caution since 52% of the teachers reported that they do not work in gifted education programs.

According to teachers, the most frequently offered services provided by their district for gifted students are: college courses (n=25); summer enrichment programs (n=24); college credit (n=21); college opportunities (n=21); advanced placement programs (n=21); clubs and extracurricular activities (n=20); some honors and/or advanced courses (n=20); all honors and/or advanced courses (n=19); courses added to a student's load (n=19); field trips (n=19); ability grouping (n=18); grade acceleration (n=17); enrichment in the regular room (n=16); and resource rooms (n=16).

Teachers were more likely to provide the following gifted education services: enrichment in the regular classroom (n=20); acceleration (n=14); field trips (n=14); clubs and extracurricular activities (n=14); curricular modifications (n=13); ability grouping (n=11); resource room teachers (n=8); and gifted education teacher serving as a resource in the regular classroom (n=7).

Interestingly, while 42% of the teachers reported that they currently work with gifted students, few shared their reasons. More teachers discussed why they had *not* become teachers of gifted students. Two themes related to social reasons and two related to personal reasons. Social reasons related to lack of administrative support and lack of gifted education programs. Personal reasons related to lack of interest and philosophy (i.e., the belief that "all children are gifted"). Likewise the minority teachers identified social and personal reasons for becoming teachers of gifted students. Some teachers also shared how their experiences with special education students influenced their vocational choice. For instance, several teachers shared concerns regarding negative experiences in special education, as well as experience in working with gifted students with special needs.

Social reasons for becoming teachers of gifted students included support and encouragement from colleagues and administration. Personal reasons included an interest in gifted students, primarily curiosity and intrigue about these students, and a determination to demonstrate that minority teachers can be competent gifted education teachers.

Interestingly, a consistent finding in studies on teachers' career choices point to negative perceptions about teachers—lack of prestige, low salary, etc. The minority teachers in this study did not reveal these concerns. Many teachers pointed to a lack of opportunity and lack of administrative support. Others discussed entering gifted education due to negative experiences in special education; that is, these teachers did not enjoy teaching special education students. Thus, such decisions to teach gifted students appear to be reactive and externally influenced rather than proactive.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to suggestions for increasing the recruitment and retention of minority teachers in gifted education. The recommendations focus on exposure, encouragement, and support throughout the educational and professional experiences of minority groups.

1. *Expose, encourage, and support minority students during middle and high school.* Because of a lack of interest in teaching gifted students, minority groups must be reached early. Teachers and counselors will need to encourage minority students to consider a teaching career in general and gifted education in particular.

2. *Expose, encourage, and support minority groups during pre-service training.* Colleges and universities should actively recruit minority teachers into their gifted education programs. Part of this recruitment requires exposing all teachers to the field of gifted education. For example, regardless of whether teachers are interested in working in general or special education, they are likely to come into contact with gifted students. Accordingly, future teachers require exposure to gifted education relative to identification and assessment, curriculum and instruction, and social and emotional needs/development.

3. *Expose, encourage, and support minority teachers during teaching career.* Assignments to gifted education classes should be based on teachers' training and experiences, as well as interest. For many of the minority teachers in the current study, an interest in working with gifted students was present; the opportunity was not. Thus, there must be greater administrative support for minority teachers to pursue teaching experiences and opportunities in gifted education. For teachers in this study, such support might entail staff development and formal educational opportunities. Minority teachers should be encouraged to pursue a specialization or certification/endorsement in gifted education, as well as given the opportunity to attend conferences and workshops in gifted education. The staff development opportunities offered by districts should also focus on gifted students; thereby increasing all teachers' exposure to gifted education.

## Conclusions

To date, a literature review produced no studies or articles that specifically address the under-representation of minority teachers in gifted education programs. The current study sought to address this void, to shed light on factors influencing the decision of minority teachers to become or not become teachers of gifted students. The minority teachers in this study did not identify commonly discussed barriers to entering education (e.g., salary, prestige, lack of parental support, lack of student cooperation, inadequate advising and counseling, poor test scores). Nor did the respondents discuss commonly identified factors that encourage their decision to enter education (e.g., encouragement from teacher or family, scholarships, and financial assistance).

Although a national study, the findings are limited due to the small sample size. Future studies must be conducted with larger numbers of teachers. Nonetheless, a critical factor identified in this study and others is the need for increased administrators and school districts to encourage minority groups to enter gifted education. Recruiting minority groups into gifted education requires providing them with gifted education exposure and experience throughout their educational and professional experiences.

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# Appendix

Code number _____

Teacher Career/Vocational Choice Survey

The University of Virginia
*National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented*
1996

*About the Survey:* The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented is conducting a national study designed to gather information on the representation of minority (non-White) teachers in gifted education programs and services. Our goal is to explore the career decisions of minority teachers relative to education, particularly gifted education. The questions are *not* to evaluate you individually, but to give us information on your career decisions as a minority teacher.

Since our goal is to understand the decision making of minority teachers, you will be asked a variety of questions. The first section focuses on gifted education options offered by your district and whether you personally provide such services. The second section asks you to share factors that affected your decisions to become or not become a teacher of gifted students. Finally, we ask you to provide information on your educational background and preparation in gifted education, as well as demographic information.

*General Instructions:* Some of the questions are answered by checking a single response to indicate your choice. We have also provided ample space for you to share information on factors that affected your decision to teach or not teach in gifted education.

Your responses are valuable. Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us as soon as possible. When you're finished, please return the survey in the stamped addressed envelope.

*Confidentiality:* You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Your name will never be placed on the questionnaire. Your answers will be treated as confidential. Individual information will not be shared with anyone outside the research team and will only be reported in a statistical form that does not identify any individual's response.

## I. SCHOOL INFORMATION ON GIFTED EDUCATION OPTIONS

*The following items relate to your professional history, and to the school district in which you currently teach.*

1. The first column lists services that may be offered to gifted students. In the second column, place a check by the services offered to gifted students in your district. In the third column, place a check if you teach or provide services in these areas. Check all that apply.

| Services for gifted students | Services for gifted students offered by my district | I teach or offer services for gifted students in this area |
|---|---|---|
| Summer enrichment classes | | |
| Saturday/weekend classes | | |
| Mentorships, internships | | |
| Early kindergarten admission | | |
| College courses for high school students | | |
| College credit for high school courses | | |
| Opportunities for high school students to go to college and take classes | | |
| Full-time magnet school or school based program | | |
| Part-time magnet school or school based program | | |
| Ability grouping | | |
| Enrichment in the regular classroom | | |
| Services for gifted students | Services for gifted students offered in my district | I teach or offer services for gifted students in this area |
| Curricular modifications in the regular classroom delivered in a planned, sustained basis | | |
| Resource rooms | | |
| Courses added to a student's load (e.g., honors seminars, early bird classes) | | |
| Clubs and extracurricular activities | | |
| Field trips | | |
| Special televised courses | | |
| Self-instructional materials and systems (e.g., correspondence study) | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Gifted education teacher serving as a resource in the regular classroom | | |
| Acceleration within the regular classroom | | |
| Grade acceleration | | |
| Advanced placement program | | |
| Honors or advanced classes in all subjects | | |
| Honors or advanced classes in some subjects | | |
| International baccalaureate | | |
| Other (specify): | | |

## II. CAREER DECISION MAKING

This section has two parts. However, you only need to complete the part related to your career choices. *Part A* is to be completed if you currently provide services to gifted students, have done so in the past, or wish to do so. *Part B* is to be completed if you do not provide services to gifted students, have not done so, and do not wish to do so. Again, answer part A *or* part B.

*Part A.* Please describe the process you went through in deciding to become a teacher of gifted students. Tell us your story as best you can recall. We are interested in factors, persons, and events that affected your decision. Provide as much detail as possible so that we can get a complete picture of your decision making. (Use the back of this sheet and add additional pages if necessary to complete your story).

Go to page 6 when you are finished.

*Part B.* Please describe the process you went through in deciding not to become a teacher of gifted students. Tell us your story as best you can recall. We are interested in factors, persons, and events that affected your decision. Provide as much detail as possible so that we can get a complete picture of your decision making. (Use the back of this sheet and add additional pages if necessary to complete your story).

Go to page 6 when you are finished.

## III. DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Gender:

_____ male
_____ female

2. Race/ethnicity:

_____ White (not of Hispanic origin)
_____ Black/African American (not of Hispanic origin)
_____ Hispanic American
_____ Asian American/Pacific Islander
_____ Native American/American Indian/Native Alaskan
_____ Other (specify: _____)

3. Age:

_____ 21-30
_____ 31-40
_____ 41-50
_____ 51-60
_____ 61+

4. Please indicate degree(s) that you have earned beyond a high school diploma, the year the degree(s) was earned, and your major.

| Degree Earned | Year | Major/Area/Emphasis |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-Bachelor's/Associate's | | |
| Bachelor's | | |
| Master's | | |
| Specialist | | |
| Doctorate | | |

5. What grade level(s) do you currently teach? _____

6. What subject(s) do you teach? (check all that apply)

_____ Mathematics
_____ Language Arts/English
_____ Science
_____ Social Studies
_____ Other (specify) _____

7. How long have you been a teacher?

_____ less than 5 years
_____ 5 - 10 years
_____ more than 10 years

8a. Do you currently teach or provide services to gifted students?

_____ no
_____ yes

8b. If no, did you teach or provide services to gifted students in the past?

_____ no
_____ yes

8c. If yes to 8a or 8b, how long have you taught/did you teach in a gifted program?

_____ less than 1 year
_____ 1 - 3 years
_____ 4 - 6 years
_____ 7 - 10 years
_____ more than 10 years

9. What type of district do you teach in?

_____ urban
_____ rural
_____ suburban

10. What is the percentage of minority students in your district?

_____ less than 10%
_____ 10 - 25%
_____ 26 - 50%
_____ 51 - 75%
_____ more than 75%

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY
PLEASE RETURN THE SURVEY IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED

# Research Monograph Series

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